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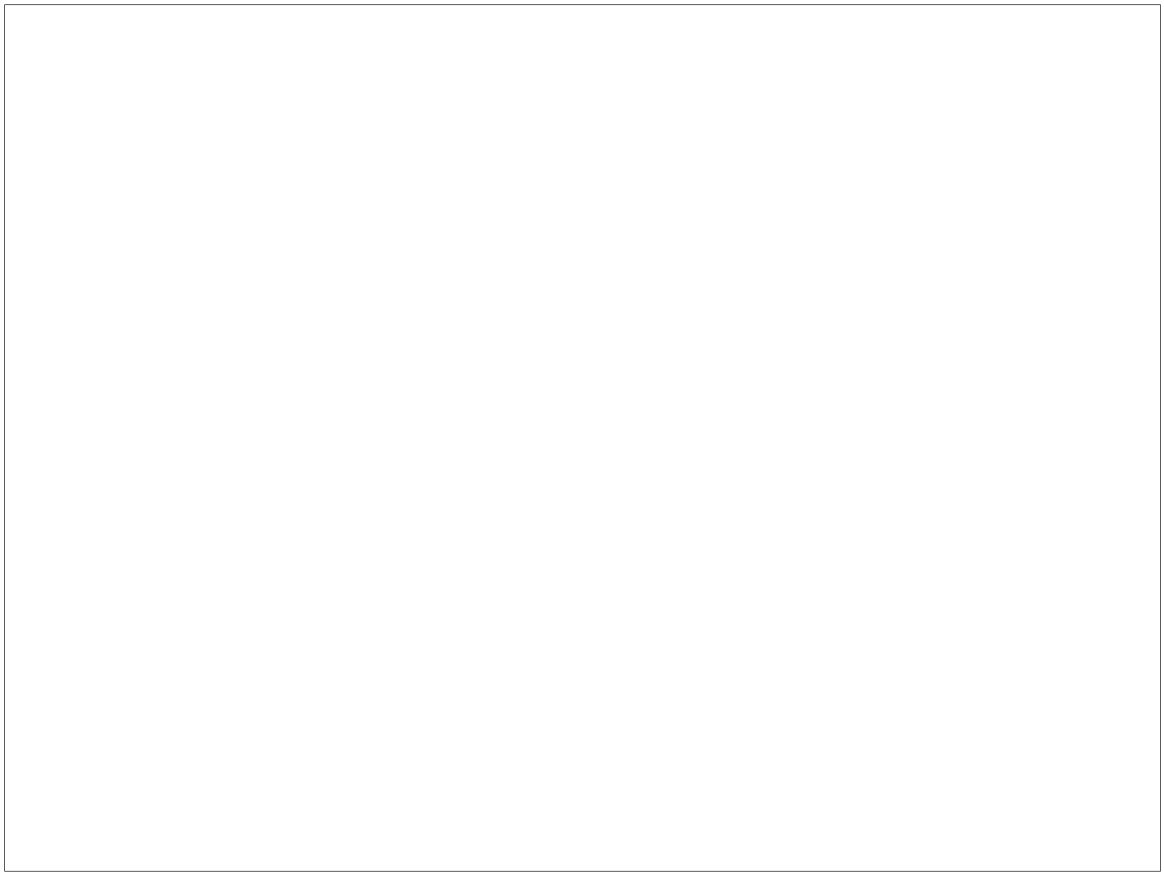

ARGENTINA: Selection of new air chief engineered by Lopez Rega. (Page 17)

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ARGENTINA

The selection of Major General Alberto Numa Laplane as army commander to replace Lieutenant General Leandro Anaya, who has retired at the request of President Peron, was undoubtedly a power play by Social Welfare Minister and presidential adviser Jose Lopez Rega to extend his control to the army. Laplane, commanding general of the 1st Corps in Buenos Aires, is considered the most pro-Peronist of senior army officers, and his selection will cause the retirement of three major generals senior to him.

The strong sentiment against Lopez Rega within the army, coupled with the probable resentment of senior officers over the blatant political nature of Anaya's dismissal, could spark coup plotting. The suddenness of the move, however, as well as the lack of consensus within the officer corps on what political role the army should play, probably rules out drastic measures for now.

The reaction of the three major generals forced to retire prematurely, particularly 2nd Corps Commander Gomez Centurion, will tend to shape the army response. Additionally, the officer corps will probably scrutinize Laplane carefully to determine if his loyalties are with the army or with orthodox Peronism. If he gives signs of being a tool of Lopez Rega, opposition to him will greatly increase.

General Anaya has been a malleable and relatively apolitical commander since he took over in December 1973. He has drawn considerable criticism from his officers because of his lack of an aggressive response to terrorism in general and to the assassinations of army officers in particular.

Of late, Anaya has established close ties with labor and opposition political leaders desirous of having Lopez Rega out of government. It was probably this fact that caused the latter to believe the moment ripe to prevail on the President to appoint Laplane.

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